

The Walk Across England

Day #3

Rosthwaite to Grasmere

Well, after two beautiful sunny days of hiking, Cynthia and I finally had the opportunity to put our fancy waterproof gear to the test, as tropical storm Gabriel swept, with full force, across the Lake District National Park on the third day of our C2C walk. I simply couldn't wrap my head around the seemingly oxymoron concept of a "tropical storm in Northern England" but our trusty weather app and, more importantly, all of the locals bending pints in the Royal Oak's pub the night before, warned us that's exactly what we were in for.

As weird as it may sound, as I pulled up my waterproof pants, laced up my waterproof boot flaps and zipped up my waterproof jacket, I was actually looking forward to getting out in some classic rainy British weather. As daunting as it sounded, the challenge of hiking over mountainous terrain through a windy downpour, felt like it naturally fit into what we had expected from our walking adventure across England.

Upon leaving the quaint village of Rosthwaite behind, Cynthia and I quickly picked up the valley path through a small gate in an old stone wall that hugged the lane. We had been warned that, even in drier weather, the valley path, that led to our 1800 foot climb to Lining Crag, was like walking through a rocky stream. And with the rain coming down in windy sheets, that description seemed spot-on accurate, as we slopped through ankle high water flowing down the path. Yet nothing could dampen, even with the hampered visibility, the gorgeous scenery that lay before us. For as far as we could see, the lush green valley, laced with countless rocky streams, worked its way through a tunnel of tall mountains, with the mighty Crag looming up ahead in the distance.

We thought we had gotten off to an early start, ahead of the other hikers, but as we approached the base of the towering Crag, we could see through the sheets of driving rain, several folks, way up high, making their way to the crest along a narrow path. Thankfully, the 600 meter hike to the summit, unlike yesterday's steep all-out, straight up climb, was much more of a meandering switch back, but today's challenge was the water rushing down our path. As we began the ascent, the fast moving water lapped along the laces of our boots and made for very slippery footing, especially as the dirt path turned to moss covered rock. Thank goodness for our trusty walking sticks, which Linda and every single guide book had said was a C2C must. The phrase "four legs is better than two" really hit home as we navigated, like the sheep all around us, our way up to the top of the summit.

Despite the grueling slip-sliding crawl to the crest of the wind swept mountain and then slopping our way through the knee high bogs of water along the flat fields at the top, we actually felt exhilarated as we stood there with the rain pounding our faces, looking out over the endless green valley that lay far below out in front of us. Even in the pouring rain the view was still stunning!

As we carefully worked our way down the steep rocky steps into the valley on the other side, mountain streams flowed all around us, as they made their way down into the wide river that defined the path of the outstretched valley before us. The rain seemed to enhance the beauty of this iconic pastoral British countryside scene. It's no wonder that Wordsworth, after living and writing here for many years, called it "the fairest place on earth".

And, as if on cue, just as the fuel from our hearty full English breakfast was waning, thanks to our grueling four hour climb, the driving rain miraculously let up. So, we grabbed a seat upon a large flat rock and gobbled down our soggy but delicious homemade tuna sandwiches, courtesy of our friends back at the Royal Oak.

The reprieve from Gabriel was short lived and, just as we finished our brief but nourishing lunch, the pounding rain started back up again. The walk down through the valley into the large village of Grasmere was stunning, as we weaved our way along miles of countless stone walls and whitewashed farm cottages, that bordered green meadows dotted with sheep and cows.

After passing over a large ancient arched stone bridge, we came upon a narrow hedgerow lined lane that weaved its way into the legendary Lake District village of Grasmere. Once the home of countless early 19th century Romantic Age poets, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, this idyllic village is now a cherished destination for walkers and motoring tourists alike and even in the pouring rain we could see why, as its beautiful 17th century buildings and cute old shops lay nestled along a gorgeous winding river.

As we approached the front door of our bed and breakfast, we worried about how our dripping wet clothes and muddy boots were going to be received. But our fears were laid to rest as Michael, our friendly host, greeted us with a welcoming smile and kindly guided us to the "drying room", where we hung our rain drenched clothes and soaked, mud-caked boots above a row of heaters that made the small space feel downright toasty. We thanked him for his thoughtful hospitality and he humbly replied that "you can't call yourself a Lake District B&B unless you have a Drying room!".

After a pint of tasty beer and a delicious dinner in the rock walled, beamed ceiling pub of the nearby famous Grasmere Inn, we walked back to our B&B in a light drizzle that was now just a faint reminder of the mighty storm we had just hiked through. And with sunny weather in the forecast for our next leg of the hike and feeling tired from our long day of walking in the rain, we fell soundly asleep with exciting thoughts of what lay ahead for yet another day in this magnificent National Park.

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WALKING TIP of THE WEEK: Like the walk that we took to Grasmere on our third day of the C2C, your footing along the many paths of Central Virginia, will vary greatly. Here you can quickly go from smooth sidewalks and pavement to uneven grass and steep rocky paths. Sure footing is the key in avoiding ankle and knee discomfort and injury. And the best way to accomplish that mountain sheep-like stability is with a set of sturdy walking sticks and the proper footwear. Depending on the terrain and surface, I recommend either a trail running shoe, like the Hoka Speedgoat and Brooks Cascadia, or a lightweight but sturdy "day hiker", like an Oboz or Merrell.

HIDDEN LOCAL WALKING PATH GEM of THE WEEK: The wonderful network of trails that start behind the Boars Head Inn and Sports Club, along the southwest side of the outskirts of the Birdwood golf course boundaries, and lead you up to the back end of the stunning Ragged Mountain Reservoir and Foxhaven paths, are truly one of our community's most precious resources. Thanks to the generosity of our neighbors at the Boar's Head and UVa and folks like L.F. Payne, we have miles of beautiful wooded paths, for our walking pleasure. Passing along lily-padded ponds, a Civil War era cemetery and climbing up the steep paths of the well marked Boars Head Heritage trails, will surely make you feel like you're getting away, while still only being minutes from town. For more information, go to Boars Head Resort.com and click the "download trail map" heading.